

The Weather

Today—Rain ending, followed by clearing skies. High in upper 40s. Tuesday—Fair and colder. Probability of precipitation, 40% today, 20% tonight. Temp. range: Today, 39-46. Yesterday, 32-45. Details on C6.

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N. Korea Releases

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Pueblo Crew

U.S. 'Repudiated' And Then Signed Reds' 'Confession'

Washington

By Warren Unna

Washington Post Staff Writers

The United States convinced North Korea to release the Pueblo crew after first delivering a mutually agreed upon "repudiation," and then signing North Korea's prepared "confession" of territorial intrusion and espionage.

"It's kooky, I agree," a high U.S. official said last night. But he emphasized that it worked.

The United States has back the 82 surviving members of the crew exactly 11 months after their capture, and, in its own eyes, did not have to "lie" about violating North Korea's territorial waters and committing espionage. The United States insists the Pueblo and its crew did neither.

'Strange Procedure'

Secretary of State Dean Rusk last night termed it "a strange procedure . . . If you ask me why these two contradictory statements proved to be the key to effect the release of our men, the North Koreans would have to explain it. I know of no precedent in my 19 years of public service."

The breakthrough, according to State Department officials, came when the United States submitted two alternate proposals to the North Koreans at the Panmunjom negotiating site and told them if these didn't work North Korea would have to take its chances at starting all over again in negotiations with the Nixon Administration.

The first alternative, which the United States had submitted as far back as October, was termed the "over-write proposal."

It called for Maj. Gen. Gilbert H. Woodward, chief of the U.S. negotiating team, to sign a receipt for the

Pueblo crew over North Korea's statement of charges, providing North Korea agreed to release the men at the same time. This was similar to what happened on May 17, 1964, when the United States "receipted" the return of two captured helicopter pilots and the North Koreans flourished this as an admission of guilt.

Conceived This Month

The second proposal, and the one which proved to work, was conceived only this month by James F. Leonard, the State Department's country director for Korea.

Under it, the North Koreans were first given in advance a formal statement. Gen. Woodward would make denying the North Koreans charges. The statement declared an apology couldn't be made and added: "My signature will not and cannot alter the facts. I will sign the document to free the crew, and only to free the crew."

Providing this was acceptable, North Korea was told. Gen. Woodward was prepared to sign North Korea's own document of charges.

"We thought by putting the two together we might

See RELEASE, A4, Col. 8

Panmunjom

By Selig S. Harrison

Washington Post Foreign Service

PANMUNJOM, Korea, Dec. 23 (Monday) — The 82 surviving crewmembers of the USS Pueblo were returned to American custody today, 11 months to the day after their capture by Communist North Korea.

North Korea marched its prize prisoners across a bleak expanse of the demilitarized no-man's-land at this truce village in a wintry climax to six months of intensive negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang.

The Pueblo, a spy-ship equipped with electronic monitoring gear, originally carried 83 men. One man was killed during the ship's capture on Jan. 23 off the North Korean coast. The long negotiations on the crew's release concerned whether the Pueblo had violated North Korea's territorial waters.

After initial identification and interrogation procedures conducted by American officers at a makeshift reception center of green Quonset huts in the Demilitarized Zone dividing North and South Korea, the crew members filed into a U.S. Army advance camp. About 100 newsmen waited there for a close-up glimpse as the men stopped for snacks in a small cafeteria.

Then the men were whisked off in a relay of helicopter flights to the 121st Evacuation Hospital at the Ascom Army base near Inchon for

See PUEBLO, A4, Col. 1 .

'Confession' Repudiated And Signed

RELEASE, From A1

push them into the 'over-write' proposal," one State Department official declared. He made it clear the United States felt the "over-write" of its signature on a receipt would be far more desirable to North Korea than an accompanying formal repudiation.

U.S. Surprised

But, to the now acknowledged surprise of the United States, North Korea decided to buy the proposal with its formal repudiation.

North Korea also took up the U.S. negotiators' suggestion that the crew be returned by Dec. 23 so that the men could be home by Christmas.

The final session, at which the time of release was agreed upon, came at 11 p.m. Saturday Washington time (1 p.m. Sunday, Korean time). State Department officials described the North Koreans as unsmiling and impassive.

"They were very business-like, very matter-of-fact. They simply said, 'We've reached agreement,'" it was explained.

Comparison Made

U.S. Officials added that, in comparison with the acrimonious sessions with North Korea ending the Korean War in the 1950's, the North Koreans this time were "moderate," always using a softer key in the actual negotiating sessions than they did in their public propaganda denunciations.

The North Korean document of charges that Gen. Woodward signed acknowledged "the validity of the confessions of the crew (that they) had intruded into the territorial waters"; said the United States "solemnly apologizes"; and had the United States give "firm assurance that no U.S. ships will intrude again."

PUEBLO, From A1

a medical check-up before a closely guarded flight to an undisclosed location.

The Ascom hospital is a maze-like complex of 31 interconnected Quonset huts sprawling along a hillside on the western edge of the Ascom base.

A helicopter pad sits on a knoll immediately overlooking the hospital entrance. One of two helipads serving the base, it is close enough to permit the prompt transfer of the crew directly into the hospital across the road after the helicopters land, with little chance for newsmen to get more than a passing look.

Initial speculation regarding the probable destination of the crew suggested that they would be flown from Ascom to the U.S. air base at Osan in South Korea and then to Honolulu and the San Diego Naval Base. But some observers believe they will go aboard a U.S. Navy vessel at the South Korean naval base at Chinhae, east of Pusan, where they can undergo interrogation at sea far from prying newsmen prior to their flight to San Diego.

News agencies reported these developments:

Prior to the release, Maj. Gen. Gilbert Woodward, who had been representing the United States in private talks on the fate of the Pueblo crew, signed a document prepared by the North Koreans concerning the release.

Woodward told newsmen

later the document contained "the usual garbage" he had come to expect from the North Koreans. He added that his North Korean opposite number, Maj. Gen. Kook Pak Chung, had been his usual "arrogant" self during their meeting Monday.

A U.S. spokesman at Panmunjon denied North Korean charges that the Pueblo had been "engaged in illegal activity" at the time it was taken into captivity. He added that the document Woodward signed was endorsed by the American official simply "to free the crew and only to free the crew."